

# Origin of H/H/H Family and Name

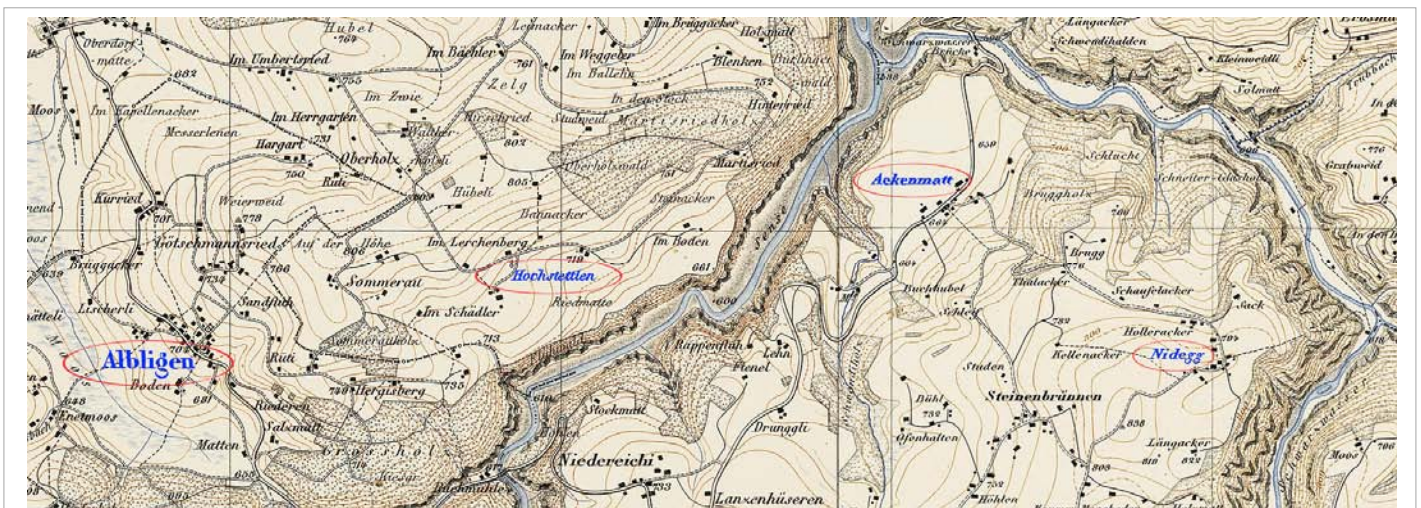
Comments by Daniel E. Hochstetler, Editor

March 1992

*Werner Gilgen was the local historian assigned by the Schwarzenburg, Switzerland tourist bureau to be the personal guide for the Hochstetler Heritage Tour group which visited in that area in July 1989. In a Sept. 20, 1989 letter to tour director Dr. Delbert Grätz, Bluffton, Ohio, Gilgen includes this paragraph, translated by Virgil Miller, describing the origin of the first Hostettler couple.*

Now I want to tell you something else: about the origin of the name Hostettler. My mother's maiden name was Hostettler. She came from Nydegg, about four kilometers from my home. She told me, and this is still claimed today - in 1349 the Plague was raging and the population was greatly decimated. So in Aekenmatt (a hamlet near Nydegg near the Schwarzwasser Bridge), there was only one person left, and as a result, in the evening only one candle was burning, only one light shone. Similarly two kilometers northwest there, in the hamlet of Hostettlen in Canton Freiburg (separated from Aekenmatt across the deep chasm of the Schwarzwasser stream), there was also only one person. Thereupon the two persons found each other, got married and founded a family. Because the man came from the hamlet of Hostettlen, the family was called Hostettler. 'Hostettler' is the original form of the name, and the names Hofstettler and Hochstettler are variations. Is this a legend, or is there some truth in it? I don't know, but the tradition seems believable. The Plague has caused much harm here; that is traceable.

-Werner Gilgen, Schwarzenburg, Switzerland



Notice the location of Aekenmatt and Hostettlen on opposite sides of the Schwarzwasser River, referred to in the "legend" by Werner Gilgen, about 4 km north of Schwarzenburg, Switzerland. The distance from Abligien to Nydegg on this detailed map is about 5 km. (This map is a Digital Siegfried Map obtained from the [Swiss Federal Office of Topography swisstopo](https://www.swisstopo.ch/) at a 1:250 000 scale. It is from a series of historical maps that was first published in 1870 and follows the Swiss dialectic spelling).

On July 1, 1989 Dr. Rudolf Ramseyer from the University of Bern and an expert in the origin of Swiss family names met the Hochstetler Heritage Tour group at Moosegg near Langnau. After dinner he gave an explanation of Swiss communities and family origins. He presented a map, copied and marked by Mr. John Hostettler from Schwarzenburg, Assistant Archivist of the State Archives of Canton Bern, showing "Hostetten" southwest of Guggisberg. Professor



Ramseyer agrees with John Hostettler that this farm hamlet Hostetten is the special origin of the Hostettler families. He says the prefixes hof- and hos- mean the same, meaning "farm," or more specifically "orchard." Later he offered the following written explanation of the origin of the name, translated by Virgil Miller.

**Hostettler:** This is the most common form of the family name, which was mentioned before 1800 as the name of citizens of Albligen, Guggisberg, Rüscheegg and Wahlern in Canton Bern - a very narrowly circumscribed area. [These are the four "townships" of Schwarzenburgerland.] From this form which is common today, it can't be completely certain, whether the original form was "Hochstettler" or "Hofstettler." Before the 16th century, this family name does not appear.

Hochstett(l)er is a name that comes from a place called Hochstetten, which means "a high place." Among those having the place name are Hochstetten, Grosshochstetten and Kleinhochstetten in Canton Bern and Hochstetten in Canton Freiburg, near the above-mentioned communities.

Hochstett(l)er is a place of origin name that goes back to the derivation "Hofstatt," that is, the place where a farm is located or where one can be built. Today we understand the word "Hofstatt," in dialect shortened to "Hostet," [to mean] a fruit orchard in the vicinity of farm buildings.

-by Dr. Rudolf Ramseyer, Rubigen, Switzerland

*There are a considerable number of place names of all kinds in Switzerland and Germany which have hos-, hof-, or hoch- prefixes. Erwin Hochstättler, from Cologne, Germany, says there are 38 such names in Germany alone. Here is a list with explanations compiled by Dr. Delbert Grätz, Bluffton, OH, of such place names in the Schwarzenburg, Switzerland area. Some of them are identified by their location in the church parish. See DJH pp. 963 - 966 for additional place names and explanations.*

Hochstetten. Village, Koppigen parish, Höchstetten part.

Höchstetten. Parish and village, District of Konolfingen.

Hofstatt, also called am Stutz. Wahlern, outer part.

Hofstatt. House in village of Nidfluh, Därstetten parish.

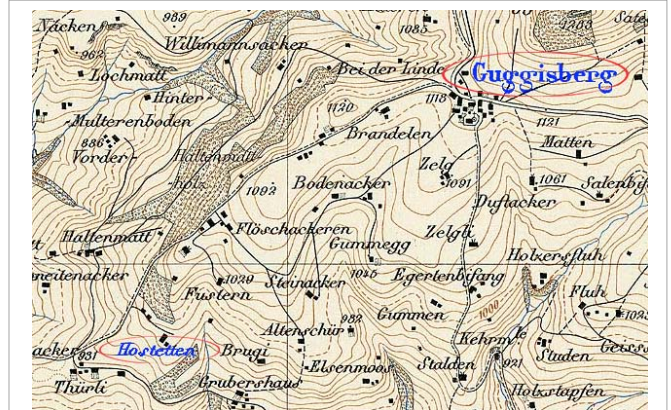
Hofstatt. Farm, Parish Heimiswil, Village section.

Hofstatt. Houses, Grindelwald parish, Itramen section.

Hofstatt. Houses, Guggisberg parish, Schlucht section.

Hofstatt. 3 houses. Lauterbrunnen parish, Vordergrund section.

Hofstattacker. House, Gurzelen parish.



This detailed map shows Hostetten, referred to by Dr. Ramseyer and Mr. John Hostettler, which is about 1.5 km SW of Guggisberg. Guggisberg is about 6 km south of Schwarzenburg.



Hofstätten. Farms, Zweisimmen parish, Grubenwald part.

Hofstetten. Village, Brienz parish.

Hofstetten. 10 Houses, Thun parish.

Hofstetten. 24 houses, Thun parish, Goldiwil part.

Hofstetten. Houses. Guggisberg parish.

Hofstetten-häusli. House, Rüegsau parish, Schachen quarter.

Hofstättlein. House, Belp, Belpberg part.

Hostatt. Small village, Wahlern parish, outer part; also called Hofstatt.

Hosteten. Village, Belp parish, Belpberg section.

Hosteten. House, Guggisberg parish.

Hostetli. House. Gadmen parish, Nessenthal section.

Hostetten. House, Kirchdorf parish, Uttigen section.

In der Hofstatt. House, Parish Thun, Strätlingen section.

Klein-Hochstetten. Village, Münsingen parish, Rubigen part.

Ober-Hofstatt. House, Thurnen parish, Riggisberg part.

*The documents and authorities cited above indicate that there may be no easy or final answer to where or when the Hostetler/ Hochstetler family originated, or what the name really means. It is entirely possible that there were multiple origins - at different times and places. While the name is consistently spelled "Hostettler" in Switzerland today, the name "Hofstetter" is also quite common in Switzerland. (See Newsletter, Dec, 1989.) Known descendants of relatives of our ancestor in Germany today use the spellings Hochstättler (Münsterhof) and Hochstettler (Bavaria).*



Welcome, in 3 languages, to the Swiss homeland of the Hostettlers of all spellings. Schwarzenburg, in the background, 20 miles south of the Swiss capital, is like a “county seat” of Schwarzenburgerland, the “middleland” of the Canton Bern.

*And then how does the common American Mennonite name Hostetter fit into the picture? The ancestors of these Mennonite Hostettlers arrived in America in ca. 1712 and 1732, and it is possible that their Swiss origin is the same as that of ours or it might represent a completely separate origin. There were other Anabaptist Hochstetlers in Switzerland, France, and Germany whose genealogical connections have also not yet been established.*



## From Another Hochstetler Historian on the Origin of our Name

Virgil Miller writes, in his 1972 book entitled, " **Descendants of Noah H. Hochstetler and Barbara Schrock: And some European background of the Hochstetler family,**" (172 pages, published by Atkinson's Print Shop, **ASIN:** B0006W28JI):

"The Hostetler family is of Swiss origin and probably came from the name 'Hostet' or 'Hochstätt' which in the dialect means 'a high place'. Thus Hostetler is a person living in a high place. The spelling of the name varies from place to place but oddly the name 'Hostettler' as used today in Canton Bern, Switzerland is almost the same as the form used by most of the American descendants - 'Hostetler', though Jacob Hochstetler spelled it with the 'Hoch'. The name is pronounced in Pennsylvania German almost exactly like the Swiss dialect pronunciation 'hush-tetler'. It is only in Alsace and Palatinate that the name has been spelled 'Hoch-'. The French spelling of 'hush-tetler' would be something like 'hoch-stetler' and the Germans have retained the 'hoch' which indicates the original meaning 'high'. Nevertheless the natives of the Palatinate still say 'hush-tetler' in the Pfälzisch dialect.

This tells almost the whole story of the migration of our family. It originated in Switzerland in Canton Bern -- some members fled to the French-speaking Jura mountain area of Switzerland, then some migrated to Alsace and Montbeliard in France. From there some migrated further north to the Palatinate in Germany and then to America. In Swiss dialect, French, Alsatian dialect, Palatinate German and Pennsylvania German the name is pronounced the same.

The Swiss recognize the Schwarzenburg region of Canton Bern as the "Heimat" or original home of the Hostettlers. The family name is still one of the most common in that region today. Schwarzenburg is about twenty miles south of Bern, nestled among hill farms and hamlets. It is divided into four communes: Rüscheegg, Guggisberg, Albligen and Wahlern. Guggisberg and Wahlern each have a 'hof' or farm that is called 'Hostet' and is recognized as the traditional home of the Hostettler family. About five miles southwest of Guggisberg, high on a steep elevation is Hostet, a farm that has long associations with the Hostettler family. Hostett is also the name of a small hamlet of farms in the commune of Wahlern, about two miles east of Schwarzenburg that stems from the time that family names began to be adopted between 1400 and 1550. So those coming from Hostett came to be called Hostettler. This is probably the first place where the name was used, and from there it spread to other areas. Wahlern gets its name from Wahlern Church, a short distance north of Schwarzenburg. The present day commune includes the city as well and the civil offices are located there. Originally the communes were parishes of the State Church -- first Catholic, then Reformed."

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